Department of Commerce
Safety Report

February/March 2002

Safety Report
February 1, 2002 through March 31, 2002

Introduction

This report provides an update to Department managers and employees on the progress of Departmental safety initiatives and information regarding important Department-wide safety issues for February and March 2002. The report also contains the latest available accident data for the Department covering January and February 2002. Section One of the report, Program Initiatives, provides updates on the safety initiatives outlined in the Safety Program Plan, now available on the new Occupational Safety and Health Program Web Site at http://ohrm.gov/safetyprogram. Section Two, Significant Safety Issues, outlines safety issues and concerns which arose during February and March 2002. Section Three, Injury Statistics, provides statistics regarding Department injuries, as reported to the Office of Workers' Compensation for January 2002 and February 2002, and an analysis of the data to assist bureaus in focusing their safety efforts.

Section One: Program Initiatives

Resources: The vacancy announcement to recruit for a GS-15 Safety Manager to manage the Department Safety Program was issued on February 11, 2002. The vacancy announcement closed on March 4, 2002. We received more than 50 applications. A selection certificate was issued on March 11, 2002, and the initial round of interviews completed.

Safety Council: The regularly scheduled Safety Council meetings were held on February 7, 2002, and March 7, 2002. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Hazardous Materials Response Division of the National Ocean Service, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) team provided an update concerning the irradiated mail at the February meeting.

Safety Program Action Plan: The Safety Program Action Plan was approved by the Deputy Secretary on February 19, 2002. The plan is posted on the new Occupational Safety and Health Program Web Site. The initial focus of the plan is to create a safety infrastructure within the Department to improve information flow between bureaus and the Department and to establish a structure and methodology to address important safety issues cooperatively. The four workgroups, which were established to address key components of the proposed Safety Program Action Plan, met several times during February and March. The goals of each workgroup are listed below. Each group reported its progress at the March Safety Council meeting.

Inspections and Self-Assessment Workgroup - This workgroup is developing a Department-wide methodology for supervisors to conduct safety self-assessments and trained safety professionals to complete annual workplace inspections.

Communications and Training Policy Workgroup - This workgroup is establishing methods for soliciting employee and supervisory input regarding safety concerns, and for increasing the level of safety awareness among Department employees and supervisors.

Reporting Workgroup - This workgroup is addressing the challenging task of developing a web-based system to report accidents which will be more comprehensive than the Workers' Compensation system.

Health Units Workgroup - This workgroup is assessing the effectiveness of Department Health Units and developing Departmental policy regarding on-site health and occupational safety services.

Employee Communications: The Occupational Safety and Health Program Web Site was activated on February 26, 2002. On **March 1, 2002**, the Deputy Secretary sent an all hands e-mail announcing the activation of the web site and urging employees to access it. The web site contains information pertaining to the Department Safety Program and to bureau Safety Programs, including the monthly Safety Reports, bureau Safety Plans, and safety contacts for each of the bureaus.

Although most of the web site is available to the public, two areas are limited to the Commerce intranet, the "Hot News" icon, which contains information regarding safety incidents at Commerce facilities, and the employee survey, which provides employees the opportunity to report safety concerns and ask questions regarding safety issues. We hope through increased employee input that we will be able to shape a Safety Program responsive to employee issues and concerns. The web site can be accessed through the Commerce Homepage at www.doc.gov, the Office of Human Resources Management Homepage at http://ohrm.doc.gov/, or directly at http://ohrm.doc.gov/safetyProgram.

OSHA Annual Report: Annually, the Department is required to provide a Safety and Occupational Health Program report to OSHA. Information includes significant accident or injury trends, plus explanations of key program initiatives completed during the reporting year. The Department of Labor extracts excerpts from agency reports to compile a consolidated report for the President. The Department submitted this report to the Department of Labor on March 21, 2002.

Section Two: Significant Safety Issues

This information is available on the DOC intranet at:
http://home.osec.doc.gov/ohrm/safetyreport-feb-mar.pdf

Section Three: Injury Statistics and Analysis

In the October 2001 and January 2002 Safety Reports, we provided information on the total number of Departmental injuries for the past five years, and analyzed the types of injuries across the Department to determine prevalence of such injuries.

Below, we update this information using January and February 2002 statistics. Please keep in mind that the data presented in the charts and tables are based upon Departmental Workers' Compensation Program records. At the present time, Workers' Compensation Program records continue to afford the most comprehensive evidence regarding workplace safety. However, the significant disruption of mail during the first quarter of FY 2002 continues to affect the validity and reliability of the data. As a result, the information presented here must, accordingly, be considered "qualified" and data from previous months changes as we continue to receive dated mail.

Total Recordable Cases Incidence Rate: To enable comparison with private industry, we are now using the OSHA "Total Recordable Cases Incidence Rate (TRCIR)" formula as our measure of injuries rather than determining the injury rate per 100 employees. The TRCIR formula divides the number of accidents by the actual hours worked in the organization and multiplies that figure by 200,000, an approximation of potential hours worked for 100 employees. In determining the total hours worked for an organization, we multiplied the number of employees by 1800 hours. A full-time employee can technically work 2087 hours per year if he or she takes no leave. However, given that the average age of our workforce is 46.93 years and the average years of service is 12.8, we imputed the average annual leave accrual rate as seven hours[1]. Based on a seven hour annual leave accrual rate, we then estimated that each employee annually uses approximately 280 hours of combined annual, sick, and administrative leave. We subtracted that total from 2087 and rounded down to 1800. Utilizing this formula, we updated all injury rates from FY 1998 to the present and now depict them as total recordable case

[1]An employee with three years of service earns six hours of annual leave per pay period. An employee with 15 years of service earns eight hours per pay period. All full-time employees earn four hours of sick leave per pay period. There are typically 26 pay periods in a leave year.

incidence rates (TRCIR)[2].

Major findings include:

- **The FY 2002 TRCIR continues to decline when compared to FY 2001 and FY 2000 data.** Although the data may not yet be complete, the ***annualized*** FY 2002 TRCIR is projected at 1.48, based on data from October 2001 through February 2002. The January 2002 TRCIR was 2.18 while the February figure was 1.32. If these figures do not change, the TRCIR will be substantially lower than for FY 2001 (1.78) or FY 2000 (2.32) as shown below.

Chart 1

- **Overall, the TRCIRs of the larger bureaus, with the exception of the Office of the Secretary (OS), continue to remain low.** The TRCIR for OS increased because of employee exposure to irradiated mail. Although ITA's TRCIR (2.12) remains higher than prior years, it reported no injuries for February 2002 (see Table 1).

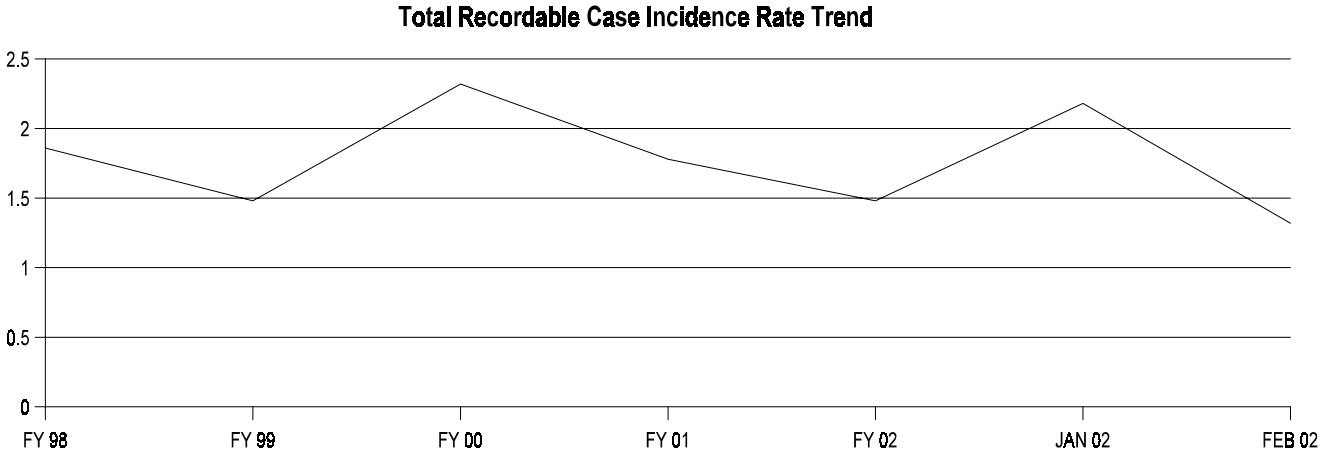
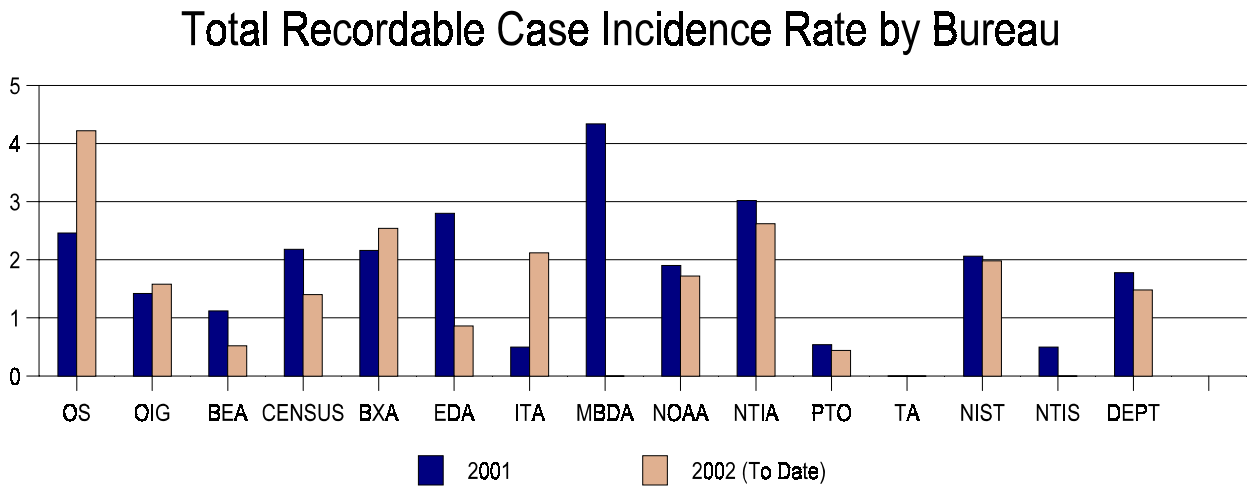


Chart 2

[2] **Please note:** The Total Recordable Cases Incidence Rates (TRCIRs) for FY 2002 presented in this table have been "annualized" based on October 2001 through February 2002 information. To accomplish this "annualization," we took the injuries for the first five months of FY 2002, multiplied these numbers by 2.4, and applied the TRCIR formula. This process enabled us to compute a projected annual TRCIR for each bureau, and for the Department. Our assumption, which may or may not be valid, is that TRCIRs will remain somewhat constant over the course of the year. As we prepare new reports, we will incorporate updated statistical data and modify the projected "annualized" rates accordingly.

- **Of the smaller bureaus (i.e., bureaus with less than 500 employees), all bureaus except the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) will have a lower annual TRCIR for FY 2002 than FY 2001 if injury statistics remain constant.** The increases in OIG's monthly and annualized TRCIRs are based on one injury. Even with the 9.52 TRCIR for January, OIG's annualized rate is 1.58 versus the FY 2001 rate of 1.42.



Types of Injuries: Information on types of injuries is provided in Charts 3 and 4 and Tables 2 and 2A. We did not project findings for the remainder of FY 2002. Key findings are explained below:

- **"Slips/Falls" continue to be the most prevalent type of injury.** "Slips/falls" accounted for 35 percent of all injuries within the Department from FY 2000 through December 2001. From October 2001 through February 2002, that percentage increased to 37 percent of total injuries. Injuries due to "slips/falls" dropped to 22 percent of total injuries for January 2002, but increased to 38 percent of total injuries for February 2002. The drop to 22 percent in January 2002 was due in large part to the increased percentage of "exposure" injuries resulting from irradiated mail incidents during that month.

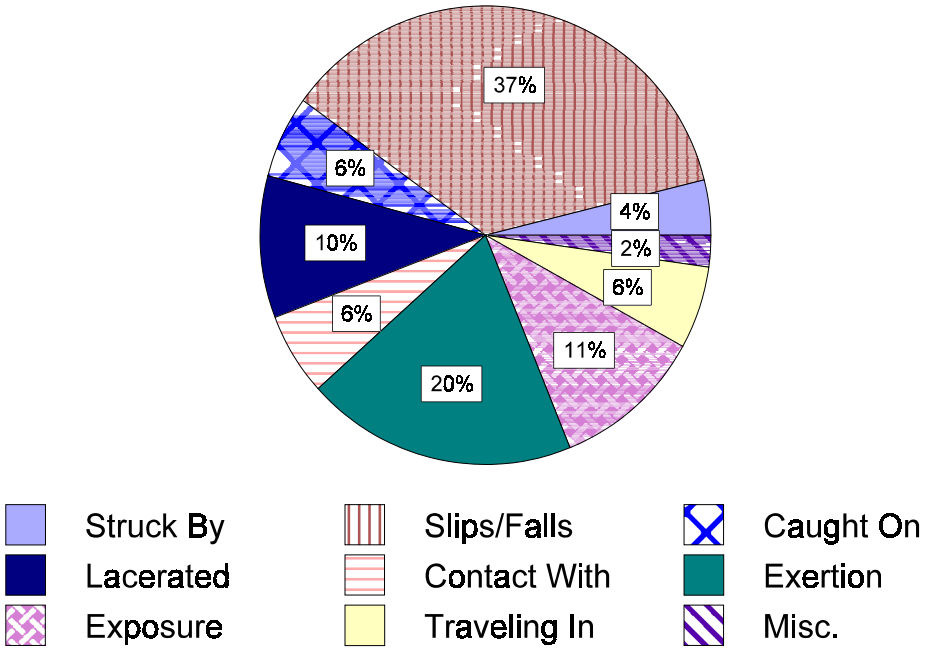
The percentage of total injuries for exposure is 11 percent for FY 2002, but 25 percent for January 2002, alone. This increase was due in large part to increased percentage of exposure injuries resulting from irradiated mail incidents. No exposure injuries were reported for February 2002.

- **"Exertion" injuries remain second in frequency for FY 2002 followed by "Exposure" injuries.** "Exertion" injuries are 20 percent of total injuries for FY 2002

while they are only 15 percent for January 2002, down largely due to the increased percentage of "exposure" injuries. Exertion injuries represent one quarter of all injuries for February 2002.

Chart 3

Injury Type As Percentage of Total Injuries for FY 2002 Through February 2002



Injury Type As Percentage Of Total Injuries

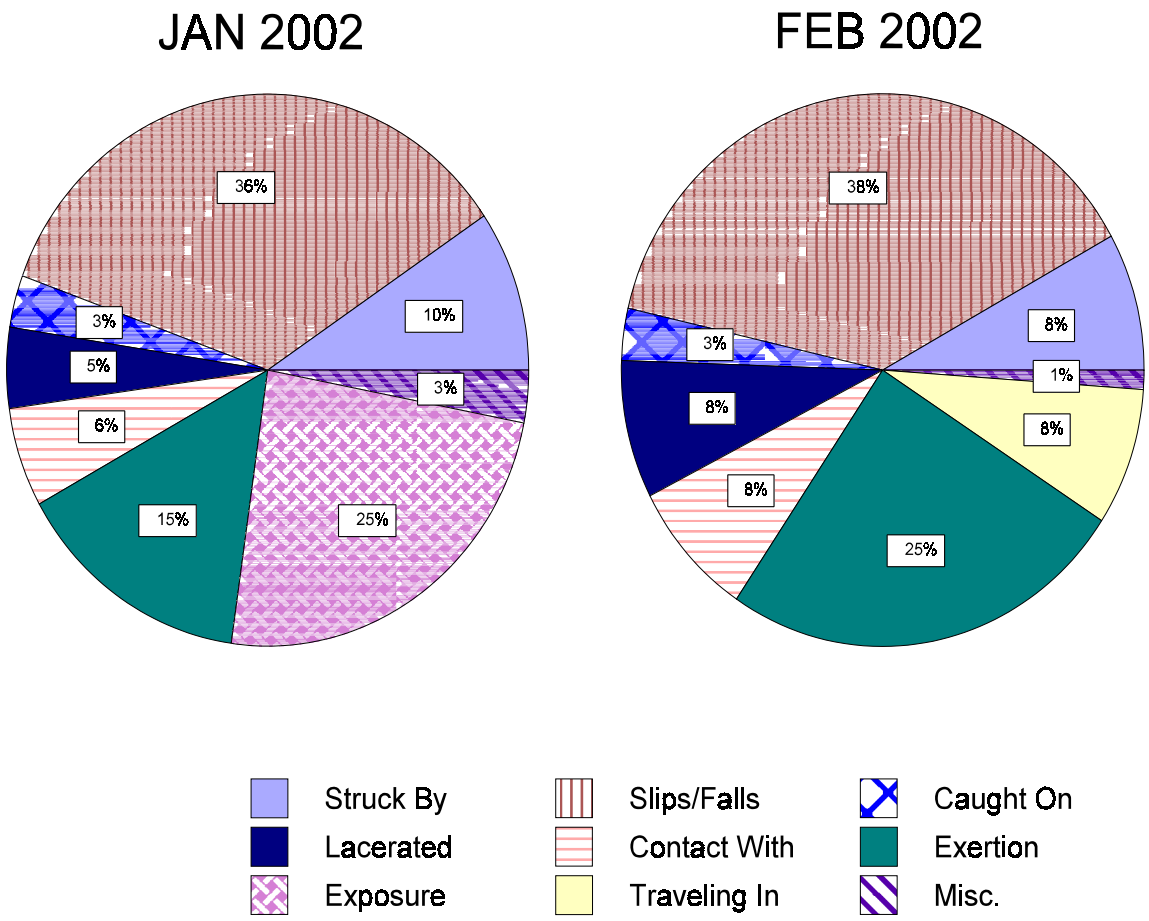


Chart 4

Table 1

TOTAL RECORDABLE CASE INCIDENCE RATE

Bureau	FY1998		FY 1999		FY 2000		FY 2001		January 2002		February 2002		FY 2002 (To Date)		
													Actual	Annualized	
	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	No.	Rate
Office of the Secretary	17	2.6	19	2.2*	34	3.82	22	2.46	13	19.14	1	1.48	14	34	4.22
Office of Inspector General	2	1.22	2	1.32	5	3.72	2	1.42	1	9.52	0	0	1	2	1.58
Bureau of Economic Analysis	8	1.74	4	.88	1	.22	5	1.12	1	3.1	0	0	1	2	.52
Bureau of the Census	282	1.32	311	1.02	383	2.82	357	2.18	22	2.36	18	1.88	94	162	1.4
Bureau of Export Administration	10	3.0	11	3.06	15	4.06	8	2.16	0	0	0	0	3	9	2.54
Economic Development Administration	4	1.7	9	3.66	4	1.68	5	2.8	0	0	0	0	1	2	.86
International Trade Administration	26	1.32	18	.9	24	1.22	10	.5	2	1.48	0	0	12	30	2.12
Minority Business Development Agency	1	1.12	1	1.1	3	3.4	4	4.34	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	280	2.52	317	2.78	306	2.66	216	1.9	15	1.64	9	.98	87	189	1.72
National Telecommunications & Information Administration	3	1.2	2	.88	2	.86	7	3.02	0	0	1	5.24	3	6	2.62
Patent and Trademark Office	38	.72	27	.46	29	.5	31	.54	2	.4	2	.4	13	27	.44
Technology Administration	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
National Institute of Standards and Technology	105	3.56	84	2.86	80	2.86	60	2.06	8	3.3	8	3.34	35	57	1.98
National Technical Information Service	2	.64	6	2.6	4	2.14	1	.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	778	1.86	811	1.48	890	2.32	728	1.78	64	2.18	39	1.32	265	525	1.48
Decennial Census 2000	182	3.42	890	11.32	4798	6.65	32	13.33	N/A	N/A					

***Population fluctuations can have a serious positive or negative impact on the Total Recordable Case Incidence Rate.**

Table 2

INJURY TYPES BY BUREAU
AGENCIES WITH MORE THAN 500 EMPLOYEES
(Through February 2002)

BUREAU	NOAA			CENSUS			NIST			PTO			ITA			OS			TOTAL
Fiscal Year	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	
Struck By/Against An Object	42	24	7	54	56	8	17	16	0	4	6	3	1	1	0	0	5	0	244
Falls/Slips	83	72	22	96	153	28	17	19	10	11	13	5	13	5	2	9	10	0	568
Caught On An Object	6	4	3	8	9	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	39
Cuts/Bites	29	20	9	55	36	6	15	12	3	1	2	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	193
Contact With An Object	23	13	5	49	24	4	8	1	3	5	6	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	146
Exertion/ Motion	75	64	15	99	54	15	15	7	5	8	3	1	4	1	2	6	3	1	378
Exposure To Chemicals/ Elements	29	13	3	12	7	0	4	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	6	18	0	11	108
Traveling In Car/Metro/ Taxi	4	4	7	3	10	7	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	39
Miscellaneous*	15	2	0	7	8	1	2	1	3	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	43
TOTAL**	306	216	71	383	357	71	80	60	27	29	31	13	24	10	10	34	22	14	1758

* Miscellaneous includes injuries not covered in the standard OSHA types of injuries. These include twisting/bending injuries, emotional/psychological stress injuries, injuries which exacerbate a preexisting condition resulting in conditions such as heart attack, seizures, and stoke.

** Decennial Census claims were omitted to provide a clearer picture of injury trends

Table 2A

INJURY TYPES BY BUREAU
AGENCIES WITH LESS THAN 500 EMPLOYEES
(Through February 2002)

Bureau	OIG			ESA/BEA			EDA			TA			NTIS			NTIA			MBDA			BXA			TOTAL
Fiscal Year	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	
Struck By/Against An Object	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	5	0	1	12
Falls/Slips	4	2	0	1	2	0	2	4	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	3	1	3	3	0	6	6	0	42
Caught On An Object	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Cuts/Bites	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Contact With An Object	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	6
Exertion/ Motion	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	2	1	8
Exposure To Chemicals/ Elements	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Traveling In Car/Metro/ Taxi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Miscellaneous*	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	6
Total	5	2	1	1	5	0	4	5	1	0	0	0	4	1	0	2	7	2	3	4	0	15	8	7	77

* Miscellaneous includes injuries not covered in the standard OSHA types of injuries. These include twisting/bending injuries, emotional/psychological stress injuries, injuries which exacerbate a preexisting condition resulting in conditions such as heart attack, seizures, and stoke.

Appendix A

New Developments Concerning Health Effects from Irradiated Mail

A panel consisting of senior health professionals from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), and mail handling managers from GSA and the U.S. Postal Service conducted a briefing at the General Service Administration (GSA) headquarters on February 5, 2002, for Federal safety and health managers to provide a brief history of the problems associated with the handling of irradiated mail and describe new procedures currently being taken to reduce these problems.

Background:

In response to the anthrax threat, United States (U.S.) Postal Service managers consulted with the Centers for Disease Control, National Institutes of Health, the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to determine the best way to kill anthrax and other biological spores in mail. A technical advisory team of scientists from these groups determined that the most practical method to kill large quantities of spores is by exposing the mail to gamma ray radiation. Since this procedure had never been used before, the team was not sure at first how much radiation was necessary to effectively kill all spores. Initially, higher levels than necessary of radiation were used, which melted any plastic in the mail and turned the envelopes brown and brittle. The melting of the plastic caused very low levels of some contaminants to be released, thus producing allergic reactions in a small number of Federal employees with asthma or other pre-existing medical conditions. Further studies by the scientific team concluded that lower levels of radiation would effectively kill all anthrax and other biological spores. Consequently, the amount of radiation to irradiate mail was reduced. The team also discovered that if irradiated mail is spread out in the open air for 2-3 days, the amount of contaminants released by the plastics and other materials is greatly reduced.

Current Developments:

Mail destined for zip codes beginning with 202-205 is now being irradiated with lower levels of radiation. The lower levels do not melt plastic and do not discolor the mail. Because the mail does not appear to have been irradiated, some employees expressed concern as to whether the mail has been irradiated. The lower radiation levels do not cause the same amount of contaminants to be released and, therefore, will greatly reduce allergic reactions.

The U.S. Postal Service is now airing the irradiated mail out for 2-3 days before it is delivered to zip codes 202-205. This process will also greatly reduce the potential for allergic reactions.

For persons who handle large volumes of mail and have sensitive skin, the U.S. Postal Service recommends that they:

- Wear non-latex gloves
- Use a moisturizer after washing hands
- Do not enclose mail in a drawer, bag, box or other container
- Handle mail in an area which has good ventilation

GSA's Mail Communications Policy Office established a web site which provides up to date information and guidance regarding the handling of mail. The address for the web site is: http://www.gsa.gov/mailpolicy. A Hot Line for such information was also established at (202) 208-7663.

Appendix B

Location of Automatic External Defibrillators

(March 2002)

Commerce Headquarters, Washington DC:

- One AED is in the Health Unit

Census Bureau Facilities:

- Census Headquarters at Suitland, MD has one AED
- Jeffersonville, Indiana facility has two AEDs

NIST Facilities:

- NIST laboratory in Boulder, Colorado has one AED
- NIST Gaithersburg facility currently has two AEDs which are on their Emergency Response vehicles. A proposal to acquire an additional sixteen AEDs for the Gaithersburg facility for $49,000 has been submitted although not approved at this time.

NOAA Facilities:

One AED at each of these locations:

- Alaska Fisheries Science Center, Seattle, Washington
- Western Administrative Support Center, Seattle, Washington
- National Logistics Supply Center, Kansas City, Missouri
- Richard Bolling Federal Center, Kansas City, Missouri
- Boulder, Colorado Laboratory
- Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory, Miami, Florida
- Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory, Ann Arbor, Michigan
- National Weather Service, Central Region Headquarters, Kansas City, Missouri
- National Weather Service, Eastern Region Headquarters, Bohemia, New York
- Three AEDs at Radar Operations Center, Norman, Oklahoma

At National Weather Service, Eastern Region Facilities, 25 AEDs have been ordered, but not installed.